Activating an Inclusive Learning Framework for Formal Adult Education Classrooms: Confronting the Challenges and Proposing Solutions

Rami Kamel

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By: Rami Kamel

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Signed by the final examining committee:

Prof. Ayaz Naseem Chair

Prof. Joyce Barakett Examiner

Prof. Ailie Cleghorn Examiner

Prof. Arpi Hamalian Supervisor

Approved by Prof. Richard Schmid
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Prof. Joanne Locke
Dean of Faculty

Date March 24th, 2014

Abstract

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In this thesis I examine the inter-linked contributions that anti-bias theory, student-centered learning theory, transformative learning theory and inclusive education theory may bring to practitioners of adult education and adult students returning to formal educational institutions. I argue that working from a perspective that is informed by the above theories and their potential applications in the adult education classrooms will benefit adult learners and practitioners alike. Selecting key elements from each of the four theories examined, I try to activate an inclusive learning framework for formal adult educational classrooms. I then try to illustrate the classroom applications using each one of these theories with related examples of their potential impact on curriculum, course planning and content choices, as well as methods to facilitate learning in an inclusive and safe environment for all. The potential benefits for the learning goals of individuals are highlighted as well as the potential for social change and transformation. The role of administrators and researchers in supporting and advancing this endeavour is also discussed.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my niece, Dalia.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction, Problem Statement and Outline of the Four Theoretical Approaches to be Reviewed

Introduction.....1

Background and Significance.....2-4

Problem.....5
Purpose.....5-6

Research Question……..…6-7

Objectives.....8-9
Organization of the Paper.....9-11

Figure 1……..11

Summary.....12

Chapter Two: Synthesizing the Literature that has Informed Adult Education Practice

Introduction.....13

Anti-Bias Theory.…..…….....13-17
Student-Centered Learning.…….....17-22
Transformative Learning……..…..……23-29
Inclusive Education.…….....29-34

Summary.....34-35

Figure 2…….……35-36

Chapter Three: Drawing the Links and Utilizing the Theories to Inform Teaching Principles in Adult Education with Examples from Adult Education and Learning Contexts

Introduction.....37

Classroom Applications Using Anti-Bias Theory……..…..….38
Examples of Curriculum and Course Content.….....39
Classroom Applications Using Student-Centered Learning……....……40
Examples of Curriculum and Course Content……...…43
Classroom Applications Using Transformative Learning…….…46
Examples of Curriculum and Course Content……...…47
Classroom Applications Using Inclusive Education…….52

Examples of Curriculum and Course Content……..…….53

Summary.....56

Chapter Four: Implications and Recommendations for an Integrated Approach to Adult Education.

Introduction.....60

Perspectives and Support for Future Development……..……60

Implications for Adult Teaching Practice.....63
Implications for Administration.....65
Implications for Research.....67

Consideration of Some Potential for Resistance……69

Conclusions.....71

References……..…….....……73-76

Chapter One: Introduction, Problem Statement and Outline of the Four Theoretical Approaches to be Reviewed

Introduction

Adult learners experience schooling and the schooling process in a vastly different manner than other students. Elements such as status, culture and socioeconomic circumstances are all part of how people can experience schooling differently (Knowles, 1970). It is particularly interesting to consider the composition of Canadian learners in the adult sector and how they arduously face this adjustment. Among the current literature in adult education, the notion of self-direction plays a large role in the way adult students learn. The idea of self-direction can be seen as two-fold. First, it serves as the practice of exerting control over the daily decisions that pertain to the learning of adult students. Second, it can be understood as the ability to gain access to, and choose from a complete range of resources made available to the learner (Knowles, 1970). This concept is particularly significant because younger learners (students under the age of eighteen) differ in many respects from the established profile of the adult learner due to their comparatively reduced years of life experiences. This is not to say that those experiences are not valuable, but that they may not be as wide-ranging as those of an adult learner who is in their late twenties or older. Contemporary adult learners tend to move toward independence with the teacher encouraging and nurturing this movement, where the student's experience is a rich resource for learning. Hence, teaching methods should include discussion and information sharing between the teacher and student. Most adult learners need to see an application to what they learn, and therefore learning programs need to be organized around real life applications (Knowles, 1970). If adult learners

acquire information and see learning in such a different fashion, then it is fundamental to consider the hardships often experienced by adult learners when they re-enter the formal schooling environment of adult education. This feeling of unease can be referred to as "culture shock" and is closely related to what Nakhaie (2006) refers to as the feeling of "otherness" when he discusses the difficulties that immigrants face when attempting to find work in a new country. It can also reflect the "cultural" sensitivity that people feel when adapting to the environment of adult education. Younger adults who find themselves in a classroom, seminar or any other formal learning context with varied ages may experience this same feeling of difference.

The term "culture shock" is commonly used to describe almost any physical or emotional discomfort experienced by those adjusting to a new cultural environment (Weaver, 1986). Similarly, reverse culture shock refers to the feelings associated with distress upon return to a once familiar culture after being immersed into a different one for a while. This phenomenon is more often associated with student experiences than what many scholars believe to be true. Although the term "culture" may seem vague in this sense, it is acknowledged that a new surrounding educational environment can affect students in stressful ways. As Hofstede (2005) states, studying and understanding culture shock without experiencing cultural shock is like practicing swimming without water. Therefore, the importance of understanding our students' lives and allowing them to have a voice in their learning must be matched with a reconciliation of our own experiences in school and learning. This is not only central to the issue, but a necessity if we wish to better teach adult learners within this sector. As a consideration to this pretext, there is a pertinent literature that could shed light on the way we instruct and develop curricula in

the adult educational realm. The central bonds between the theories in this literature can be directly applied to the adult education field. More specifically, the notions presented apply to both the educator and the learner.

If a social structure does not permit dialogue, then that structure must be changed (Freire, 2001). This mindset is embedded in the promotion of how "one cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding" (Freire, 2001, p.95). Factors involved in educational issues around the world need to assume roles that can respond to learning equitably. Educators need to be challenged to find teaching practices where students are exposed to engaging in exercises that correspond with the promotion of adequate learning. This refers to a practice that seeks to engage with the social determinants of the learner's perspective and that is oriented toward sharing the learning experience with the teacher. Within the context of this thesis, individuals that accept poverty, oppression and dominance as part of the structural nature of our current educational system tend to have a passive voice in their learning. Hopefully, my account will add to the growing body of literature that suggests a more inclusive teacher-student attitude as well as transformative learning that brings students closer to social transformation and content diversity within the classroom.

By identifying the linkages between the four main theories that will be reviewed and their relationship to adult education, we will see that together, the educator and student have the opportunity to build interactions of reciprocity and mutuality that are reinforced through validation of their knowledge and lived experiences. Freire (1970)

offers a radical educational pedagogy for fostering learning that focuses on the processes of learning rather than the outcome. Within this framework, student experiences are used as a starting point for the teacher and learner to engage in a mutual process of discovery oriented to uncovering the structures that perpetuate oppression. These lived experiences encourage both the student and teacher to value the interchange of knowledge and, namely, increase the students' sense of agency as both parties generate strategies for engaging in social change collectively. Freire's (1970) theory and position will provide insights into practice that support adult learning and that allow students to fully comprehend the oppression occurring by social conditions such as marginalization in order to allow them to move toward praxis. Paulo Freire defines praxis as reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. That is, action that is informed and intent on advancing social justice that promotes human emancipation (McLaren and Leonard, 1993).

In addition to the above contributions of Paulo Freire, Jack Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning explores the developments by which students gain a more comprehensive worldview and extended capacity for knowledgeable decision-making. The theory itself offers further direction for understanding how the student engages with pre-existing attitudes, values, and beliefs that constrain their ability to act autonomously, something adult learners often face. Mezirow (1991) provides insights into the role played by critical reflection and reflective discourse on uncovering, challenging, and reshaping the cognitive and affective aspects of learning at the individual level. Together, the theories of Freire and Mezirow offer a set of principles and methods for adult educators to structure a wide range of teaching networks that support

critical analysis, a more inclusive worldview, and emancipatory praxis. Likewise, Mezirow's (1991) theory stipulates that the role of both culture and context can connect to the activities human beings partake in. In his words, "Culture can encourage or discourage transformative thought" (Mezirow, 1991, p.3).

The Problem

There is little discussion in the literature about ways in which the educational theories and practice aiming to understand the contextual reality of adult learners could be applied to support learning for adult students. Salient elements from the various theories can be synthesized in order to elicit how these can inform adult education teaching practices. One of the common problems in adult education is the lack of professional development for adult educators. When adult educators come from various backgrounds, they are often not well prepared to teach adult learners. It is therefore important to consider the potential practical applications derived from four particular theoretical areas: 1) anti-bias theory, 2) student-centered learning, 3) transformative learning and 4) inclusive education.

Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to reflect on better ways to instruct adult education students by considering the contributions made by the work of theorists writing in the four areas mentioned above. As adult learning continues to evolve, teaching approaches must also continue to evolve and meet the demands of adult learners in today's diverse society, classrooms and formal learning contexts. I believe that the integration of the theoretical contributions of scholars working in areas related to the work of Paulo Freire will be advantageous. This integrated approach will help adult education teachers

understand the important issues related to diverse classrooms and learning frameworks in order to create a constructive context for learning in their daily practice. The significance of this analysis also lies in the theoretical and practical contributions that it hopes to make to teaching and learning experiences generally. The review of the literature that follows in the next chapter offers a theoretical analysis of insights from anti-bias theory, student-centered learning, transformative learning, and inclusive education that is central to the learning process.

The Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to draw out the connections between the four theories that will be reviewed and to answer the question: What are the inter-linked contributions of anti-bias theory, student-centered learning theory, transformative learning theory and inclusive education theory to practitioners and students in adult education contexts?

The assumption behind this research question and thesis is two-fold: a) True relationships, love and the will to help people are the bases on which real and effective learning is based; and b) There is a necessity to have faith in the individual ability to think critically. Human beings must acknowledge that learning is a process that everyone goes through, whether you are a teacher or a student. The requirements for adequate social development truly perpetuate a deeply rooted human feeling that has yet to be widely observed (Horton, 1990). Creating supportive learning environments that recognize the importance of the teacher-student relationship is central to strengthening instruction at the adult education level. As Lindeman (1945) states, individuals are themselves entangled in the administrative matters that govern education and are often

given less attention than necessary in the field. These issues must be made a public concern so that student empowerment can be created through constant reflection and an increasing engagement toward social change. Given the variety of initiatives supposedly oriented to fostering empowerment, it becomes necessary to examine the ideological foundations in adult education more closely. Teachers can engage in relationships with their students that support identifying systematic, oppressive forces and working toward developing a human touch in fostering social change. In this context, empowerment serves as a tool to reduce and even eliminate power and to promote basic human rights.

Within the context of this thesis, it is important to consider some other relevant assumptions. First, education belongs to everyone, and everyone should have the right to learning in an environment that is conducive to individual success. Teachers have a responsibility to work collaboratively with individuals to promote learning for all. Additionally, teachers have a responsibility to recognize and address the social influences that create each individual's learning context and process. Second, people's capacity for intellectual growth and autonomy needs to be valued. Adult learners are knowledgeable about their own educational needs and the direction they need to follow in order to succeed in school. They have the right and capacity to define their own path and determine when and how they need help. Third, although teachers cannot directly empower people, they can serve as a guide to help people empower themselves. Teachers can support students in this process by helping them develop and use resources to their advantage in order to foster a sense of control and self-efficacy. Fourth, teachers and students need to share the role of teacher and learner in their relationships with one another. This involves surrendering the right to determine the educational path of

individual students and valuing the mutual experience of both teacher and student. This requires the sharing of resources, including knowledge and the right to discuss procedures that will affect them. Finally, the process of empowerment develops optimally in relationships that foster mutual respect. The capacities of both parties must be valued and supported, and the interactions between the two must be viewed as mutually beneficial. These assumptions demarcate the critical prerequisites that are needed to establish the relationships of equity and respect envisioned in adult education practice. They form the ground upon which teachers and students can define meaningful educational priorities mutually, determine strategies that advance learning and ultimately engage in praxis.

Freire's (1970, 2001) theoretical contributions pave the way for my attempt to activate an inclusive learning framework mentioned in the title of this thesis. In this respect, the ideas developed by Freire and their applicability to today's andragogy cannot be ignored. His far-reaching ideas offer insight into the way we treat learning inside and outside of the classroom. They are not only present in the literature, but offer adequate ways of sustainable lifelong learning for all students, with a special focus on adult learners.

The Objectives

1. Analytically discuss each of the four theoretical approaches identified and considered to be useful in the framework of supporting adult student learning: Anti-bias, Student-centered, Transformative learning and Inclusive Education. The literature review will allow us to identify how the theories can be synthesized and

used in order to better understand the factors that lead adult learners to thrive in a particular learning environment while keeping the various theorists' frameworks in mind.

2. Outline the principles behind the theoretical concepts while comparing the four theories mentioned under the previous point. Assess how these theories provide a framework for critically analyzing the structure of our current adult educational institutions.

3. Critically analyze some examples from the adult educational realm that will help demonstrate how the methods can be beneficial. This will also allow the reader to understand how the theories relate to adult education.

4. Define some guidelines, based upon the theories reviewed for building a stronger theoretical framework and applications for adult learners around the world that draw upon the educational theories that have been reviewed.

The goal of my research is to help and support individuals to recognize the importance of modeling appropriate behaviors and building a better adult educational system. Hopefully, my thesis will make a contribution that will connect the dots between the four different theoretical lenses to better guide the daily practice of adult education teachers and to overcome the challenge of understanding how to foster this development.

Organization of the Paper

The first chapter has provided the reader with some background about the topic and explained why we should alter our adult teaching practices.

In the second chapter, I will critically analyze the elements of the four theoretical approaches in the literature that can be linked and used to inform practice in the field of adult learning:

1. Anti-Bias Theory (hooks, 1994, 2000)
2. Student-Centered Learning (Freire, 2001; Dewey, 2000; Hofstede, 2005)
3. Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2000; Freire, 2001; Horton, 1990; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010)
4. Inclusive Education (Freire, 2001; Dewey, 2000)

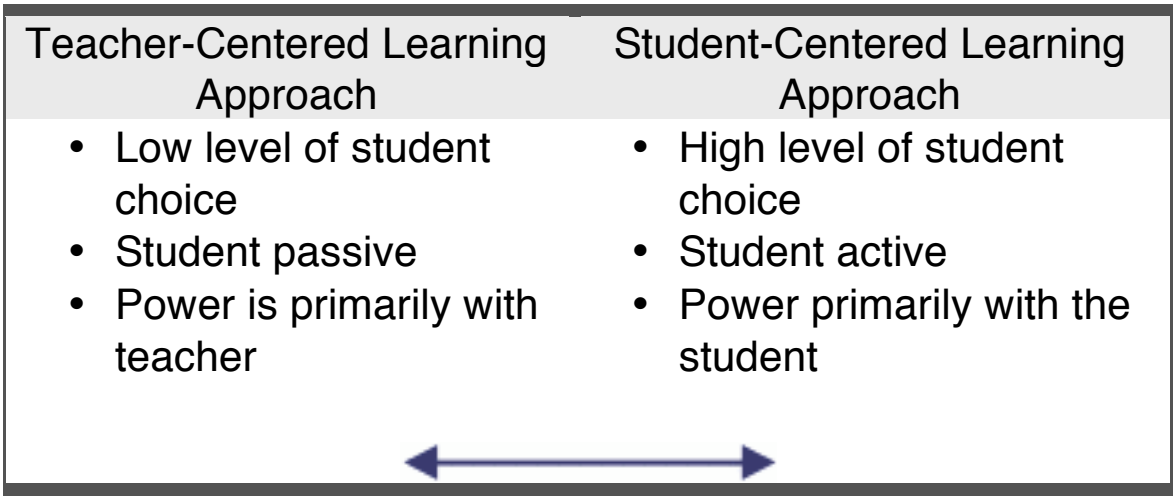
I will subsequently consider the emerging critical perspectives that can inform practice in the field and draw information from a few other authors.

In chapter three, I will further illustrate the contribution of the educational theories under review by considering some examples from adult education and learning contexts, based on some cases that relate to the literature. Suggestions of the way these theories can promote critical analysis using these examples from adult education and learning contexts will be made as well.

In chapter four, I will discuss the implications and recommendations for an integrated approach to adult education in an inclusive perspective. In doing so, I will present a set of principles to guide development and execution of adequate teaching and learning methods that are grounded in the educational theories of Freire (2001), Dewey (2000), Hofstede (2005), hooks (1994, 2000), Mezirow (1991, 2000), Horton (1990) and Dale & Hyslop-Margison (2010). I will then summarize the lessons learned and conclude with final thoughts.

I maintain that adult educators should attempt to discover new methods and create new incentives for learning. Such education is designed to equip students with the proper means for arriving at their selected goals. It helps adults gain the knowledge about their capacities and limitations, both elements that are necessary to sustain their creative spark throughout their lives. Adult education helps promote new cultural values and helps adults appreciate their surroundings with new lenses. In an age of specialization, adult education helps adult learners understand their relationship to the "whole" (Lindeman, 1989). It supplies the instruments for changing the way adults learn, and recognizes that knowledge also comes from experience and underlines the importance of fostering a teaching and learning practice that satisfies these criteria.

Figure 1: Summary Table Describing the Difference in Learning Roles. The Student-Centered Learning Approach is the Ideal.



Many aspects of adult education have been cited as opportune entry points for change, including the focus of curriculum, didactic content, and andragogical principles. In adult education, it is important to acknowledge that andragogical principles (Fig. 1)

and their particular application to how students are taught may be one of the most important elements to encourage adult learners. Educators need their own set of necessary skills, attitudes and capacities to help their students engage in critical analysis. An important way to expand perspectives and foster the interdisciplinary collaboration may be to focus on exposing educators to the ways of thinking and theorizing found in the theories and methods present in the literature review.

Summary

The preceding section on the background, the problem statement, the purpose, the research question, the objectives and the organization of the thesis has established the inspiration behind the topic of this thesis and the important contributions that it hopes to make in informing adult education practice. Although each of the theorists discussed stresses the importance of proper teaching methods, there appears to be limited knowledge and engagement with the application of more adequate practices that are derived from these theories. This fact has lead to the creation of significant barriers that prevent the actualization of more effective adult teaching practices. The linkages between the four theories that will be examined in the following chapters will likely facilitate the promotion of an informed andragogical framework for teaching practice, and extend understanding of our global responsibility and capacity to instruct adult learners in the best way possible.

Chapter Two: Literature Review of the Four Main Theories

Introduction

In the following pages and as discussed in Chapter I, I will critically analyze the elements of the four theoretical approaches in the literature that can be linked and used to inform practice in the field of adult learning:

1. Anti-Bias Theory (hooks, 1994, 2000);
2. Student-Centered Learning (Freire, 2001; Dewey, 2000; Hofstede, 2005);
3. Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2000; Freire, 2001; Horton, 1990; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010);
4. Inclusive Education (Freire, 2001; Dewey, 2000)

I will subsequently consider the emerging critical perspectives that can inform practice in the field and draw information from a few other authors.

1) Anti-Bias Theory:

The anti-bias curriculum is an approach that challenges human prejudices that can include but are not limited to racism, sexism and homophobia. The most notable characteristic of this theory and practice in the classroom is how it applies to the specific age of the students. This type of platform provides adult learners with a solid understanding of current social problems and issues while providing them with strategies to avoid inherent human biases and improve social conditions for all (hooks, 1994). The overwhelming significance of the interrelationship between race, gender and class has a strong impact on what mainstream school boards consider important and worthy of study when it comes to discourse in education (hooks, 2000). The premise of anti-bias theory relies heavily on presenting multiple, if not all sides, of a particular viewpoint of any

subject matter presented within the schooling system. hooks (1994) argues that the teacher's use of control and power over students reduces the learner's in-class enthusiasm and teaches obedience to authority. Correspondingly, she states that the classroom can be a source of constraint but also a potential source of liberation. Limiting student perspectives however ultimately leads to: "confining each pupil to a role, assembly-line approach to learning" (hooks, 1994, p. 13). In essence, the anti-bias curriculum helps people critically analyze various social conditions, which in turn educates them to find ways to reduce social oppression and promote social justice. In the field of adult education, the "hidden curriculum" encompasses all the values passed on by teachers and educators, and from the school or educational milieu. For example, schools might unknowingly enforce the teaching of a particular novel that contains racist views, which ultimately transmits the values of dominant culture. This can be harmful to students who have sensitivity to such course content. This is not to say that the novel cannot teach or convey subject matter or moral principles that are not valuable in some way, but that educational institutions should include the student's perspective in order to arrive at a curriculum that satisfies various beliefs and therefore, the criteria of anti-bias theory. This is but one example of how human beings are taught to adhere to what society identifies as the "standard" social norms. hooks (1994) also advocated that schools should encourage their students and teachers to transgress, and sought ways to use collaboration to make learning more relaxing and exciting. She described teaching as "a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning" (hooks, 1994, p. 11).

Similar to what Paulo Freire (1970, 2001) believed, anti-bias curriculum claims

that varying degrees of oppression exist in educational institutions, and that a biased curriculum perpetuates that oppression. For adults, this can interfere with interpersonal relationships and impede the acquisition of skills and knowledge required in order to adapt back to the formal educational setting. The anti-bias approach urges adult educators to be aware of these social limitations and to do everything in their power to eliminate them. It is also intended to teach individuals about acceptance, tolerance and respect. Thus, engaged pedagogy must recognize each classroom as different and constantly reform and re-conceptualize strategies to address each teaching experience (hooks, 1994). This will then allow adult students to critically analyze material that is presented to them in the classroom. Adult learners need to apply such knowledge directly outside of the classroom more than any other people, and making connections to the content they learn is therefore imperative.

When experiencing life changes at such varying ages, people quickly develop useful coping strategies, which allow them to adjust to their environment as needed. Some individuals resort to the use of "progressive defense mechanisms", which may eventually develop the ability to learn better in a given environment. As adult learners usually arrive with a large amount of "baggage" to the classroom, this need to adapt must be met with adequate teaching practices to facilitate the transition into learning. Without it, the level of stress caused by change, ambiguity, and unpredictability can be quite high for some while others may require an unchanging, unambiguous, and predictable learning environment to feel "academically" and socially secure. Weaver (1986) considers that the psychological make-up of the individual may be the most important factor when considering this. Moreover, the truly diverse population in adult learning centres makes it

understandable that theory and practice need to evolve to satisfy the needs of students. The object is to eliminate existing stimuli and avoid new negative inducements related to the discomfort felt by the students by making the surroundings less stressful, more positive and welcoming of difference.

A quick review of the literature indicates that there are three basic explanations that lead to the lack of comfort felt by students in new learning situations: the loss of familiarity, the breakdown of interpersonal communications, and an identity crisis. When a person enters a new social environment, behavior is no longer clearly defined. It then becomes unclear to the learner how to adapt and this experience of uncertainty causes them to re-evaluate their reasons and motivations for pursuing their education (Weaver, 1986).

According to Freire (2001), a system of dominant social relations can create a culture of silence that instills a negative, silenced and suppressed self-image for the "oppressed". It is contended that in order to overcome this, the learner must develop a critical consciousness to recognize that this culture of silence is created to oppress. Also, a culture of silence can cause the dominated individuals to lose the means by which to critically respond to the cultural surrounding that is imposed on them by a dominant force. Social domination is currently interwoven into the conventional educational system, through which the "culture of silence" eliminates the paths that lead to the development of adequate learning. Anti-bias theory, however, attempts to create an entity for learning that opposes this culture of silence and oppression. If the objectives of anti-bias theory are reached, they have the potential to produce genuine development for adult learners.

The intentions of the anti-bias curriculum are to raise awareness of bias within the schooling process and to ultimately reduce, if not eliminate it. Anti-bias curriculum actively provides learners with a concrete understanding of the common social problems and issues that surround them, in hopes of helping them use their own life experiences and adequate strategies that will improve social learning conditions for them and their peers. In doing so, we can see how the work of Paulo Freire parallels the purpose of anti-bias curriculum. Instead of presenting the culturally dominant view of a subject or idea, the anti-bias curriculum attempts to present an all-embracing perspective. By adopting this view, students will be able to analyze topics from a wide range of perspectives and therefore see the similarities and differences between their views and those of others on a given subject matter (Freire, 2001). The anti-bias curriculum also brings adult learners to consciously consider that culture has deep impact on behavior and personality. Communication is definitely a breakthrough to new ways of interacting with others, and gives scholars insight into civilization's need for human interaction on an authentic level (Merriam and Ntseane, 2008). If we think of how adults learn, we can quickly see that previous ways of accomplishing tasks, solving problems, and thinking in general which may have worked effectively all our lives may now be ineffective once adulthood is reached. This is especially true when entering a new cultural environment where much of the learning occurs on an individual basis.

2) Student-Centered Learning

Student-centered learning is an approach to education that focuses on the direct needs of the students. This approach has many implications for designing curriculum and interactivity of course content and acknowledges the individual student voice as central to

the learning experience. Considering this, student-centered learning builds on some of the key components discussed in the section on anti-bias theory.

In traditional education methods, teachers direct the learning process and students assume a receptive role in their education. Armstrong (2012) claims that traditional education ignores and subdues learner responsibility. As a result, some educators have replaced traditional curriculum approaches with so-called "hands-on" activities and "group work", in which a student determines the content of study and the path they wish to follow. In other words, this process involves inverting the traditional teacher-centered understanding of the learning passage and putting students at the heart of the process. Key amongst these changes is the premise that students actively construct their own learning. Other theorists such as Dewey (2000), Piaget (1973), and Vygotsky (1978), focused on how students learn and are primarily responsible for the move toward a student-centered classroom.

Kember (1997) describes two broad orientations in teaching: the teacher-centered and content oriented conception and the student-centered and learning oriented conception. In a very useful breakdown of these orientations, he supports the view that students construct their knowledge and that the teacher is a facilitator of learning rather than a "dictator" of information. Student-centered learning allows learners to actively participate in discovery learning processes from an autonomous viewpoint. A variety of hands-on activities are administered in order to promote learning in a unique fashion. A summary table is included in the appendix that summarizes the role of the student and the role of the educator in this course of development (p.11, Fig. 1). Furthermore, distinctive learning styles are encouraged in a student-centered classroom, which provides students

with the ability to create a better learning environment for themselves. One example of a student-centered approach to curriculum design is "Problem-Based Learning" (PBL). It allows for some choice within a program of areas that students may study. It also permits students to set some of their own learning objectives and outcomes, dependent on prior knowledge. For adult students, this resonates, due to their bank of prior knowledge. Problem-Based Learning, through the use of problems and triggers, encourages the students to develop their own learning goals, thereby filling the gaps in their knowledge or understanding (Boud and Feletti, 1997). This element of choice or control is referred to in many of the definitions of student-centered learning. These valuable learning skills can also help adult students enhance their motivation for re-entering the formal classroom. Therefore, when students are given the opportunity to gauge their learning, learning becomes an incentive for the students. Because learning can be seen as a form of personal growth, adult students are encouraged to utilize self-regulation practices in order to reflect on their work. For that reason, learning can also be constructive in the sense that students identify themselves within their learning framework.

A student-centered classroom must be free of bias in order to avoid dominant views within the classroom setting. Since students are responsible for identifying content that is relevant to them, student-centered classrooms exhibit active learning because students are increasingly researching material pertinent to them. The teacher acts as a facilitator in a student-centered classroom. Here again, the similarities between the nature of anti-bias theory and student-centered learning are emphasized. In order for a teacher to facilitate a student-centered classroom, he or she must become aware of the diverse backgrounds of the students. To that end, the incorporation of educational practices that

promote diverse learning styles, thereby accommodating the varied learning styles of adult students, can be beneficial to a student-centered classroom (Freire, 2001).

As Dewey (2000) states, all education should progress by the participation of the individual in social consciousness. He also contends that the school is primarily a social institution where students learn to use their knowledge for ends that meet their needs. The school itself must represent contemporary life as real and vital to the individual as it would in any other area of life (Dewey, 2000). Although classroom activities are the primary vehicle for instruction in a student-centered learning classroom, there are no commonly shared criteria for what constitutes an acceptable project. Projects can vary greatly in the depth of the content and structure, the clarity of the learning goals, and guidance from the teacher. They usually consist of a few hands-on activities that might either be single-subject or multidisciplinary. Some projects involve the whole class, while others are done in small groups or individually. Student-centered learning uses each student's abilities, interests, and needs to better serve the student's learning purpose. It therefore sees the classroom and the teacher as learning facilitators and acknowledges student perspectives as central to the learning experience while completing classroom activities of the sort. Student-centered learning differs from many other methods because it requires students to be active and responsible participants in their own learning. This approach has many implications for the design of the adult education curriculum and course content.

In terms of critical pedagogy, student-centered learning can be linked to what Freire (2001) strongly promoted: a student body with critical thinking abilities. What Freire (2001) vigorously opposed was the "banking concept of education", in which the

student is considered an empty vessel to be filled by the teacher. He states: “it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power” (Freire, 2001, p.77). In addition, thinkers like John Dewey (2000) were strongly critical of the transmission of mere facts as the goal of education. Dewey (2000) often described education as a mechanism for social change, explaining that “education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction” (Dewey, 2000, p. 16). Freire’s (2001) work builds on this by placing it in context with current theories and practices of education, laying the foundation for what is now called critical pedagogy. There are several reasons why student-centered learning should be integrated into curriculum at the adult learning level. Some of those reasons are that it strengthens student motivation, promotes peer communication, reduces disruptive behavior, builds student-teacher relationships, promotes discovery and active learning, and makes the student responsible for the learning path that is taken.

Hofstede (2005) states that everyone carries patterns of thinking, feeling, and action learned throughout their lifetime. Hence, they have been socialized by much of what has been acquired in early childhood and their environment because a person is most susceptible to learning and assimilation at that time. As soon as certain patterns of thinking, feeling and action have established themselves within a person’s mind, it then becomes easier for individuals to use their view of the world to help them critically assess what is important to them and adapt accordingly. This description is a segway into another theoretical concept, the “software of the mind”.

The "software of the mind" reflects the mental platform representing the social environment in which individuals grew up and collected their life experiences. The programming begins with the family and continues within the community, at school, and in the workplace (Hofstede, 2005). This development is very much similar to the socialization process that human beings go through, with primary socializing agents being the home and the family, and secondary ones the school and peers. It is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one group or category from others. This is directly related to how adult learners differ from their counterparts in the youth sector. This basis of difference stems not only from a psychological point of view, but from a cultural one as well.

Culture is not innate; it is acquired through socialization. As adult learners adjust themselves to their re-entry into schooling, they have to re-adapt and to "un-learn" their old ways or their "operating system" (Hofstede, 2005). However, the way individuals deal with this re-adjustment and express their feelings is heavily shaped and altered by the new educational culture imposed on them. Thus, a student-centered approach allows students to ease their way into the new environment because they hold a certain amount of control over their educational "destiny". As both anti-bias and student-centered learning share commonalities, the next theoretical framework continues to build on the notions discussed thus far. More specifically, the concept of culture or sub-culture should be critical for the making of meaning described in transformative learning theory because these classifications are not necessarily universal, as different age groups as well as those from diverse cultural backgrounds inevitably see relationships and the world in a variety of ways.

3. Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is defined as the expansion of consciousness via transformation of the capacities of individual human beings, and is facilitated through a deliberately directed process of critical analysis. According to Mezirow (1996): "learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). Both Paulo Freire (2001) and Jack Mezirow (1991) have applicable accounts to this end. First, Freire (2001) offers his views on critical pedagogy and analysis through his three main theoretical contributions: the banking concept of education, the culture of silence, and the student-teacher dualism. Mezirow (1991), on the other hand, compared childhood learning and adult learning by emphasizing that learning is a socializing acculturation process whereas adult education can be transformative and move "the individual towards a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable and integrated meaning perspective, the validity of which has been established through rational discourse" (Mezirow, 1991, p.7). Transformative learning can also change a person's beliefs or attitudes or even transform a person's entire perspective: "A change in perspective is personally emancipating in that one is freed from previously held beliefs, attitudes, values, and feelings that have constricted and distorted one's life" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.320).

According to Mezirow (1991), transformative theory emphasizes "meaning making" using two concepts: meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. The former, meaning schemes, are groups of concepts, attitudes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings which shape a particular interpretation of subject matter. The latter, meaning perspectives, are groups of

related meaning schemes which act as perceptual and conceptual codes to form how individuals think, believe and feel as well as how, what, when and why people learn. Mezirow (1991) argues that through critical reflection, meaning schemes and meaning perspectives shape how adults understand their experiences, especially those brought about by a "disorienting dilemma" or significant personal crisis, such as re-entering the educational realm at an adult age. Critical reflection is thus perceived as essential in transformative learning for examining the production of practical knowledge.

Mezirow (1981) identified a variety of elements in the transformation of one's perspective. These include a disorienting dilemma, self examination, a critical assessment of personally internalized role assumptions, a sense of alienation from traditional social experiences, relating one's discontent to similar experiences of others or to public issues, exploring options for new ways of acting, building competence and self-confidence in new roles, acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans, provisional efforts to try new roles and to assess feedback, and a re-integration into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective. All of the above constituents hold a different, yet equally important role in the process of transformation. However, the very first element in the list, a disorienting dilemma, may serve as the incentive for transformation throughout the learning process. For example, transformation is more likely to occur when a significant life event transpires, such as the death of a loved one, divorce or a significant loss of employment or income (Mezirow, 1981).

In his later writings, Mezirow (1997) describes change in one's "frame of reference". He defines frames of reference as "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences" (Mezirow, 1997, p.7). A person's frame of

reference has two dimensions: habits of mind and a point of view. The habits of mind are a way of thinking influenced by a person's cultural, social, educational, economic, political, or psychological experiences. Habits of mind then become articulated in a specific point of view, which is defined as the amalgamation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation. An example of a habit of mind is ethnocentrism, the predisposition to regard others outside one's own group as inferior. The point of view, in this case, can be the resulting complex of feelings, beliefs, judgments, and attitudes we have regarding specific individuals or groups, such as homosexuals, welfare recipients, people of color, or in some cases even women (Mezirow, 1981). Mezirow (1997) asserts that one of the initial processes in learning is to search for evidence to support a point of view. That point of view may be the justification for pursuing the formal course back into the schooling process after several years of being away. People may learn by establishing new points of view or by transforming one's point of view. The most difficult learning process is transforming habits of the mind, which necessitates critical reflection on the assumptions through which one understands the world (Mezirow, 1997). A change in a person's frame of reference may occur as a transformation of habits of mind or an accumulation of changes in points of view. Mezirow (1997) contends that people do not make transformative changes in the way human beings learn as long as what is learned fits comfortably in the existing frames of reference known to that particular human being.

Mezirow (2000) contends that a person can become critically reflective of assumptions through instrumental or communicative problem solving. According to transformative learning theory, one learns how to improve performance through

management of the environment or other people in instrumental problem solving. Communicative problem solving involves two or more people "striving to reach an understanding of the meaning of an interpretation or the justification for a belief" (Mezirow, 1997, p.6). Hence, the role of transformation is one that can involve the contributions of more than one individual. Transformative learning requires students to become aware of their own assumptions as well as the assumptions of others. Learners need to engage in dialogue or discourse that fosters alternative points of view and critical examination of evidence pertinent to the subject matter being studied or discussed. Similarly to how the student must not experience learning in an unconscious manner, a progressive educator must not experience the task of teaching in a mechanical fashion. In doing so, the educator must not merely transfer the concept to learners (Dale and Hyslop-Margison (2010). Rather, transformative learning is a social process and "discourse becomes central to making meaning" (Mezirow, 1997, p.10). Merriam and Caffarella (1999) identify Mezirow as the major theorist for the theory of transformative learning. However, it is important to mention that Freire (1991) has posited a theory of adult learning that is similar to Mezirow's. Freire's (1991) theory focuses more on the social changes within transformative learning whereas Mezirow's theory centers on the individual person's transformation (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Transformative learning theory ultimately results in the transformation of perspectives for people, which Mezirow (1991) explains as the process of becoming aware of how and why our environment has come to restrict the way we perceive and understand our surroundings. Thus, changing the instilled structures of expectations within schooling is likely to make possible a more inclusive and less discriminating

learning perspective for adult learners. These changes have impacted educator's methods of teaching and the way students learn in a very deep fashion. In an emancipatory communicative act, this reconstruction proposes that human action and understanding can be fruitfully analyzed as having a dialectal structure (Habermas, 1984). The anticipation of freedom from unnecessary domination relies on the student ability to use the structures of communication in order to establish an understanding of society. In essence, one might say that we teach and learn in a constructivist-learning paradigm. This means that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing life and reflecting on those experiences. This view of society is used to make a conceptualization of the social-life context. When human beings encounter something new, they must reconcile it with their previous ideas and experiences. Thus, they change their prior beliefs completely, reunite the old beliefs with the new ideas, or may discard the new information as irrelevant. In any case, people are active creators of their own knowledge. It is important for teachers to acknowledge the increasing role and function of the educational practices they utilize as well as their own biases. This will allow educational practices to evolve, and so will the approaches to teaching and learning into new and innovative ways to reach diverse learners. When a teacher allows their students to make inquiries or even set the stage for their own academic success, learning becomes more productive. With a student-centered learning environment that is free of bias, students have the opportunity to explore their own learning styles and have that style transform in some cases. In that respect, "successful" learning also occurs when students are fully engaged in the active learning process. In essence, the teacher's goal in the learning process is to guide students into making new interpretations of the learning

material, thereby "experiencing" content instead of simply absorbing it. Hence, the idea that "true" learning is acquired through the accomplishment of tasks that lead the individual to transform their learning (Merriam and Ntseane, 2008).

In terms of curriculum practice, the adult student has the opportunity to gauge how they are going to apply the knowledge they assimilate. Student learning processes are greatly enhanced when learners participate in deciding how they may demonstrate competence in a field of study. This pedagogical implication enables the student to establish a unique learning objective, and marry that objective to their specific learning needs (Mezirow, 2000). In this stage of learning, the teacher evaluates the student by providing honest and timely feedback on individual progress. Building a relationship with students is an essential strategy that adult educators should utilize in order to gauge growth in a classroom where transformative learning is to occur. Furthermore, students can learn through one another in a classroom where such open dialogue is present (Vygotsky, 1978). Through effective communication skills, the teacher is able to address student needs, interests, and overall engagement in the learning material, providing feedback that encourages self-discovery and education. In placing the teacher closer to the peer level, both knowledge and learning are enhanced, benefitting the student and the classroom at large. Through a socio-cultural perspective on learning, support is important when fostering independent thinking skills. As peer-to-peer interaction develops, collaborative thinking and social interaction with a diversity of other students will allow for a more wide-ranging understanding and exposure to material.

Myles Horton's articulation of the importance of having a broad vision of where individual motivations are within the mind frame of a learner is central to the theories

discussed thus far (Horton, 1990). In addition to this, he describes the role of the educator not as an expert, but as one who intervenes and facilitates understanding in order to help people develop their capacity to make the appropriate decisions in their own lives (Horton, 1990). Horton once wrote a poem that strongly encompasses this ideal: "Live with them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. But the best of leaders when the job is done, when the task is accomplished, the people will all say we have done it ourselves" (Horton, 1990, p. 248). This passage incorporates elements pertaining to anti-bias theory, the student-centered learning framework and transformative learning theory as discussed thus far. It also relates strongly to Freire's critical pedagogy and to the broader social context in which schooling, learning and life in general truly occur (Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010).

4) Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an approach to schooling with a focus on student needs that differ from what many would consider "mainstream" ones. In addition to the general student population, it appears that a particular cohort of learners confronted with any cultural, personal, and identity differences need to see a curriculum that allows for wide-ranging inclusion. The underlying assumption of the model is that as people's experience and understanding of cultural difference becomes richer, their associated competence in a vast array of relations increases. More specifically, Paulo Freire's (2001) strong aversion to the teacher-student dichotomy sheds light on this notion. The acknowledgment of a separation between teacher and student is present, but Freire suggests that a reconciliation of equality between the two roles would be the ideal (Freire, 2001). This thought can also be applied to the integration of subject matter and teaching material that meet the needs

of adult learners.

Inclusive education is a way to help integrate students in need into a classroom, but does not necessarily mean students with "special needs". Note that the term "special needs" here does not inescapably only imply individuals who are cognitively challenged, but can also include students with dyslexia or other learning difficulties. Essentially, there is a wide range of student clientele that can fall within the "need" of being integrated. It is also important to note that implementation of practices to aid students with particular cases varies. In general, schools most frequently use inclusive education for students with mild to severe special needs. Whenever possible, those students receive additional help or special instruction in the general classroom, and are treated like regular members of the class (Freire, 2001). In formal adult education settings and based on my own practice, it is not uncommon to see that the most specialized services are often provided outside of the regular classroom. In this case, students occasionally leave that setting to attend smaller, more intensive instructional sessions, receive other related services or simply give up because of the lack of support they get inside of the classroom.

The non-inclusion of individuals reduces the disabled student's social importance. The critical element is that maintaining their social visibility should never be compromised in order to increase the likelihood of academic achievement. Proponents also consider that society accords people with certain "restrictions" less human dignity when they are not as visible in general education classrooms. Many individuals feel as though they do not "fit in" at school for various reasons and for an academic institution to consider itself fully inclusive, it must satisfy the central criterion of being welcoming to all. Moreover, students who spend more time in a diverse learning environment show an

increase in social skills and academic proficiency. Advocates of inclusive education suggest that students who learn in such an environment are more sensitive to their peers' academic challenges and have improved leadership skills. Adult learners can benefit from this in particular because they have both preset political ideas as well as a more well rounded ideas as to what is valuable and important in their lives, which is something that their younger student peers may have much less of or even simply do not have.

Inclusive education differs from previously held notions of integration and mainstreaming, which tend to be concerned principally with disability and so-called "special educational needs". This implies learners preparing for or deserving of accommodation by the mainstream educational system. In contrast, inclusive education is about the individual's right to participate in learning and the school's duty to accept, nurture and teach the student. The type of education rejects the use of "special" classrooms to separate students with and without disabilities. First and foremost, an importance is placed upon the full participation of students with certain learning disabilities in order to respect their rights as human beings. Because many adult learners need to see the application of their education to the real world, inclusive education is beneficial because it gives all students skills that they can use inside and outside of the classroom. Fully inclusive schools, which are rare, no longer distinguish between various types of programs. The issue is that because so many of the adult education students return to the classroom with a large amount of emotional, personal and sometimes psychological baggage, the general education system needs to allow all types of students to engage in classroom material and conversations by including a wider range of classroom topics. Examples of these can be curriculum content that includes topics of

reading, writing, listening and speaking components that encompass content that might be of interest to students. A way to reconcile this is by allowing students to offer suggestions themselves when it comes to course content, wherever applicable. Specific examples of these will be provided in chapter three.

Students in an inclusive classroom are generally placed with individuals of the same age, regardless of whether the students are working above or below the typical academic level for their age. However, in adult education, it is not uncommon for students to range in age of eighteen to twenty-four, on average, and have the same academic competencies. Moreover, to encourage a sense of belonging, emphasis is placed on the value of friendships within the classroom. To harbor this, teachers need to nurture a relationship between all students in the classroom as often as possible. This can be difficult at times considering the age gap that may cause a common ground to be difficult to attain. However, if accomplished, this is used to show students that it takes a diverse group of people to make up a community, and that no one type of student is better than another. This ultimately helps remove any barriers that may occur if a student is viewed as "helpless" (Dewey, 2000). Such practices also reduce the chance for elitism among students and encourage cooperation among groups. While the implementation of strategies for inclusion can occur outside of school, it is frequently left up to classroom teachers to implement such strategies. Collaborating will help increase teacher's awareness about student needs within school settings.

There are many positive effects of using an inclusive method of teaching and a curriculum that integrates material as such to benefit students of all capabilities in adult education. A curriculum that includes all learners can help ascertain a student population

that has a higher likelihood of success in the formal classroom setting (Freire, 2001). Even though some critics believe that "normal" students might be slowed down by the full inclusion of students with special needs, the harm caused by the exclusion of any student would be socially unacceptable and academically detrimental to those learners. Because adult students in a given classroom vary in age and tend to come from such wide-ranging backgrounds (professionally and culturally), the exclusion of any one individual would lead to repercussions that far outweigh any harm that their inclusion may have because of stigma. Additionally, there is often a label attached to those students and it is often challenging to leave that label behind once it is assigned.

Due to a high level of ambivalence in their educational progression, some students may require more individualized attention, such as tutoring services provided by the school itself. Less common alternatives include home schooling and, particularly in developing countries, distance education. In our more modernized schooling processes, an anti-discriminatory climate has provided the basis for much change in policy and statute, and this, all over the world. New developments in policy and in law include "The Convention against Discrimination in Education" of UNESCO, which prohibits any form of discrimination, segregation in education. This one movement calls on all governments to give the highest priority to inclusive education.

For schools, the requirement that students be educated in the least restrictive environment possible encourages the implementation of inclusive education. Dewey (2000) furthers this idea by stating that the community's duty to education is a moral one. It is through social activism and discussion that society can regulate and form itself. However, it is through education that society can organize personal means and resources,

and thus shape itself in the direction in which it wishes to move. Inclusive education is thus the form of education that is the fundamental method of social progress and reform, that moral education which centers on this conception of the school as a mode of social life (Dewey, 2000). The best and deepest moral training is precisely that which one gets through having to enter into proper relations with others in unison. The present educational systems, so far as they destroy or neglect this unity, render it difficult or impossible to get any genuine, regular moral training (Dewey, 2000).

Some research has shown that the inclusion of students helps them understand the importance of working together, and fosters a sense of tolerance and empathy among the student body. Some other notable positive effects are in areas such as improving communication and social skills, increasing positive peer interactions, and post school adjustments. Additionally, the development of positive attitudes and perceptions showed an improvement in self-esteem and in some cases improved motivation in school. If such results are likely to occur, then the significance this has to adult learners in light of their needs cannot go unnoticed.

Summary

Teachers who are responsive know how to base learning experiences on the realities of the student. These can include home experiences, community experiences, language background, and belief systems to name a few. Pedagogy that is culturally sensitive is good for all students because it builds a caring community where everyone's experiences and abilities are valued. The goal remains to maximize the participation of all learners in the community schools of their choice and to rethink and restructure policies, curricula, and practices in schools and learning environments so that diverse learning

needs can be satisfied, whatever the origin or nature of those needs are. All students can learn and benefit from education, and schools should thus adapt to the social and cultural needs of students, rather than students adapting to the needs of the school. The individual differences between students are a source of affluence and variety, which should be supported through a wide and flexible range of responses. The challenge of rethinking and restructuring schools to become more responsive to the needs of their adult students, calls for views that can extend the idea of strength through diversity not only to school administrators, but to all participants in the educational system. Parents, teachers and community members are but few of the many groups of citizens that have the responsibility to do so.

Figure 2 is an attempt to summarize the linkages between the four theoretical approaches described in this Chapter especially for the educator and student-learner.

Figure 2. Comparative Table of Each of the Four Theories' Main Contributions for the Educator and the Student

Theories	Educator's Perspective	Student's Perspective
Anti-Bias Theory	The classroom is a source of constraint but also a potential source of liberation. The teacher's use of control and power over students reduces the learner's in-class interest and teaches obedience to authority, which must be avoided at all costs (hooks, 1994).	Adult learners usually arrive with a large amount of "baggage" to the classroom; this need to adapt must be met with adequate teaching practices to facilitate the transition into learning. The psychological make-up of the individual may be the most important factor when considering this. (Weaver, 1986)

Student-Centered Learning	Educators have replaced traditional curriculum approaches with so-called "hands-on" activities and "group work", in which a student determines the path they wish to follow in terms of the content they assimilate (Dewey, 2000).	Problem-Based Learning, through the use of problems and triggers, encourages the students to develop their own learning goals, thereby filling the gaps in their knowledge or understanding (Boud and Feletti, 1997).
Transformative Learning	A progressive educator must not experience the task of teaching in a mechanical fashion. In doing so, the educator must not merely transfer concepts to learners (Dale and Hyslop-Margison (2010). Transformative learning is rather a social process and "discourse becomes central to making meaning" (Mezirow, 1997, p.10).	Adult education can be transformative and move "the individual towards a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable and integrated meaning perspective, the validity of which has been established through rational discourse" (Mezirow, 1991, p.7).
Inclusive Education	Educators need to nurture a relationship between all students in the classroom as often as possible.	Inclusion is about the individual's right to participate in learning and the school's duty to accept, nurture and teach the student. Thus, the student has the responsibility to participate accordingly.
Summary Linkages	All four theories share the common view that educators must be active participants in the learning process, just as the student is (hooks, 1994); (Freire, 1970, 2001); (Dewey, 2000); (Mezirow, 2000).	All four theories maintain that the learner must be granted the opportunity to participate in their learning by having their surroundings be as "educationally welcoming" as possible (hooks 1994, 2000); (Freire 2001, Dewey 2000, Hofstede, 2005); (Mezirow 2000, Horton 1990, Dale & Hyslop-Margison 2010).

Chapter Three: Drawing the Links and Utilizing the Theories to Inform Teaching Principles in Adult Education

Introduction

The summary table presented at the end of Chapter 2 describes the main contributions, for the benefit of educators and learners, of the four theories examined for better adult education practices: 1) anti-bias, 2) student-centered learning, 3) transformative learning and 4) inclusive education. Inspiration from these theories would help improve the currently less than adequate teaching practices for adult learners. Getting teachers to accept that we must change our current methods can be as challenging as teaching them how to apply these principles in their classrooms.

In this chapter, I propose to discuss other areas of contributions made by these theories with classroom and curriculum applications. Subsequently, I examine the above literature by eliciting the connections between the theories while providing specific examples as to how one could properly educate students in the context of adult education classrooms. I will argue that working from a perspective that is informed by the above theories and concepts will benefit adult learning.

The following is the outline for this chapter:

- Classroom applications using Anti-Bias Theory and related examples of curriculum and course content.
- Classroom applications using Student-Centered Learning and examples of curriculum and course content.
- Classroom applications using Transformative Learning and examples of curriculum and course content
- Classroom applications using Inclusive Education and examples of curriculum

and course content.

Classroom Applications Using Anti-Bias Theory

To begin, let us see how activities in an anti-bias classroom can help address the social oppressions that people experience within school. As previously mentioned, any approach that perpetuates exclusion and privilege creates political, economic and social structures that do not recognize the responsibility of education to create positive social change. Anti-bias theory helps us recognize diverse interpretations. Considering the multiplicity and varying ages of most adult learner populations, the premise of anti-bias bears a particular significance to their educational needs. As anti-bias theory requires certain conditions for classroom conduct, educational methods must direct the learning process and students to assume an active role in their education. Armstrong (2012) claims that traditional education ignores and subdues learner responsibility. As a result, this process involves inverting the traditional teacher-centered understanding of the learning process and puts students at the heart of the learning process by letting them actively construct their own education. In essence, the anti-bias curriculum helps people critically analyze various social conditions, which in turn prepares them to find ways to reduce bias and promote social justice. hooks (1994) also advocates that schools should encourage their students and teachers to transgress, and seek ways to collaborate to make learning more stimulating. She describes teaching as a facilitating process that calls for collective engagement in the participation of learning (hooks, 1994).

Similar to what Paulo Freire (2001) believed, the anti-bias curriculum claims that various forms of oppression exist in educational institutions, and that a biased curriculum

perpetuates that oppression. For adults, this can interfere with interpersonal relationships and impede the acquisition of skills and knowledge required in order to adapt back to the formal educational setting. The anti-bias approach urges adult educators to be aware of these social limitations and to do everything in their power to eliminate them. It is also intended to teach individuals about acceptance, tolerance and respect. Many of these points share similarities with the student-centered learning and inclusive education frameworks. As adult learners cannot voice their learning needs in an environment that perpetuates exclusion, it is important to have a curriculum that considers student expectations when it comes to the end goals of learning. Making this connection is not only central to better the learning experience of the adult student, but a necessity when it comes to fostering learners that are able to act upon their own purposes, values and beliefs rather than uncritically acting on those of others.

Examples of Curriculum and Course Content

When incorporating anti-bias activities, adult educators should seize moments that allow for the implementation of new activities rich in material for study and critical analysis. For example, if a student comes from a racially different background than most other students in the classroom, teachers should do what they can to get an idea about how to help the other students accept the newcomer without prejudice. A way to do this is by acknowledging the presence of that student and allowing them to have an identity within the classroom. Allowing the student to introduce himself or herself and to provide classmates with some basic personal information can help ease this process. Also, teachers should assess changes in attitudes and whether the curriculum needs to be fine-tuned to adapt to the changing classroom. It is important to evaluate mistakes, share

successes, and provide consistent encouragement for students. As the teacher-student relationship grows on a one-to-one basis, individual biases and attitudes from past experiences will become apparent in the larger group. This will then allow the educator to have reason to engage students in a discussion to understand their prejudices and biases, and thus transform their ideas to eliminate them as much as possible. Asking them questions and observing their responses and comfort/discomfort level can help when planning anti-bias activities and lesson plans. This will also help the teacher understand how students perceive the world around them, isolate the source of their biases, and enhance positive learning patterns. One example could be to have students in a social studies class identify their own country's influence on the environment, whether it is positive or negative. In recognizing the elements that differ from one country to the next, students will uncover why they may value conserving the environment in some parts of the world and not in other parts. Following this, students can then find ways to alter their original habits and approaches of viewing a particular topic and adjust accordingly. A list of competencies could be created to identify the elements that students should leave with once they complete their time in an anti-bias classroom. Some of these include: construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-identity, empathic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds, and the ability to stand up for what the student believes in or for their student peers, especially in the face of bias.

Classroom Applications Using Student-Centered Learning

The theory of emancipatory education developed by Freire (1970) originated from his own experience and view of society as being characterized by relations of power and domination. Therefore, if education is to serve the needs of the oppressed, it must become

a vehicle for liberation. The oppression that people experienced though conditions such as poverty was viewed by Freire (1970) as a fundamental process of dehumanization that turned people into "objects", negating their reality and their capacity to meaningfully engage in acts of change. Freire (2001) suggested that during the process of traditional education, oppressed people are further dehumanized and effectively silenced as an expert (the teacher) delivers a body of knowledge that is largely based on the reality of the dominant class and therefore, does not reflect or validate the concerns, needs, or experiences of the oppressed. The oppressed, in this case, simply refers to the student body that has been denied the opportunity to have their voice play a meaningful role in the learning process. If adult learners are instructed in such a fashion, their overall identity and willingness to participate in formal learning would be highly deterred. This approach of knowledge transmission contributes to the objectification of people by rendering adult learners into "objects" where they engage only as passive recipients rather than as individuals capable of acting upon their own ideas. According to Freire (1995), if the educator is not encouraging the learner to question, challenge, and see the exercise of power when it contributes to injustice as problematic, then they are encouraging the behavior by not dissuading it. Thus, the educators need to be fully conscious of the interests they serve and must believe in the efficacy of the learning process as it rests on the trust they build with the learners inside and outside of the classroom. Allen (2002) stresses that if the teacher is to follow the lead of the oppressed (the learners) in defining and discovering genuine ways of engaging with and acting on the conditions of oppression, they must believe in the knowledge and understanding of the oppressed.

Freire's (1970; 2001) educational model is grounded on viewing teaching and learning as internally related processes, where all parties learn from each other as they share their knowledge. Such flexibility requires that teachers and learners recognize the validity of their own knowledge and the knowledge of others. In many ways, this reflects the characteristics of an education that is free of bias, fully inclusive and focused on the student's transformative learning to become aware of their own assumptions as well as the assumptions of others. Engaging in dialogue that fosters alternate points of view, critical examination and a student body that actively constructs their own learning are but few ways of harboring this approach. Within this process, a number of key variables need to be examined more closely because they distinguish the combination of approaches in this thesis from other more conventional educational structures. Engaging with learners can be facilitated by active participatory learning methods where the intent is for students to deepen their understandings of reality through critical reflection on both personal and collective dimensions of the problem they are encountering (Freire 1970, 1995). Problem-posing is an example of a three-stage methodology that involves listening to understand the felt issues or themes of concern in the group, collectively engaging in participatory problem-solving dialogue around a "code" that physically represents the identified group issue and engaging in action. Throughout the process, the teacher is responsible for intentionally structuring the problem-posing dialogue that is grounded in the learner's expressed issues. Naturally, the teacher is also responsible for bringing personal knowledge and voice to the classroom but in a way that broadens and deepens collective understanding without minimizing the view of others.

The changing demographics of the adult student population in today's society have

provided a climate where the use of student-centered learning is thriving. The interpretation of the term "student-centered learning" appears to vary between authors as some equate it with "active learning", while others take a more comprehensive definition including: active learning, choice in learning, and the shift of power in the teacher-student relationship. It is used very commonly in the literature, but this has not necessarily transferred into practice. Student-centered learning is not without some criticism but in general it has been seen to be a positive experience for both the teacher and the student. For example, the emphasis on the value of student-centered learning is to place learners at the heart of the learning process and meeting their needs (Dewey, 2000). This is then taken to a progressive step in which learner-centered approaches mean that people are able to learn what is relevant for them in ways that are appropriate. As a result, waste in human and educational resources is reduced as it suggests that learners no longer have to learn what they already know or can do, nor what they are uninterested in. Although recognizing that it is not necessarily an easy task, it is hoped that this discussion has gone some way to providing evidence and ideas to move all people higher up the continuum towards a more student-centered practice.

Examples of Curriculum and Course Content

Reading a text is usually something people prefer to do on their own, without interruptions, and at their own speed if possible. To save time in class, teachers may ask students to read a novel, play or textbook before the lesson. If there are comprehension questions, teachers may ask students to prepare them at home and bring them in for classroom discussion. In an English literature class for example, reading as a group in

class can be enjoyable, with students helping one another to understand and sharing reactions. For examination purposes, even multiple-choice practice questions can be the basis for discussion in small groups. It is much more interesting for students to discuss their answers than to just be given the answers, especially in a language class. Once the questions have been answered, students can be prompted to explain why they came up with the particular interpretation that they had. Moreover, if students are permitted to select a novel of choice, this can allow them to sincerely participate in the classroom discussion or assignment and identify within the content of the book.

Listening is also an exercise that people usually partake in individually. Comprehension tasks or questions help students understand better, but doing such tasks alone can make them feel isolated, especially when they do not understand the topic of the conversation too well. Therefore, the content of a listening practice or exam should include subject matter with multiple perceptions from which the learners can select. At this point, the learner can feel more at ease upon their first few exposures to the listening task, which then can allow him or her to attempt different types of exercises with varied content. In the end, the nature of the examination questions remains the same, so making the content relevant to the students does not compromise their intellectual ability or what the exam is testing.

Class discussions are perhaps the most enjoyable and accessible form of learning in a typical student-centered classroom. The most productive discussions tend to involve students who share personal life experiences and who provide opinions whenever they feel comfortable to do so. Although there is not one particular formula for how to conduct discussions within a classroom, such exercises tend to work best in pairs or small groups

because students feel more comfortable and willing to contribute (Simon and Schenke, 1991). In larger groups or in a whole class, students can get drowned out if one particular individual is overly talkative. Also, once one person gives his or her view, everyone else might find it easier to simply agree or disagree without providing any valuable insight or justification that is pertinent to the topic of discussion. A typical dialogue may be a simple exchange of views based on pictures, like one from a textbook unit on jobs and earning a living (Seidman, 1998). To make the discussion even more appealing, topic selection can be made individually, or after deliberation with the other group members (ideally two to four students maximum). A large part of communication involves bridging an information gap: Person A may know some things about a particular topic that is unfamiliar to Person B while Person B may know some things about another particular topic that is unfamiliar to Person A. Often, it is challenging for students to participate in a conversation that discusses a subject that is unfamiliar to them. This is a natural feeling in class, either because students might not know enough facts or because everyone knows the same facts. Nevertheless, because adult learners have their wide range of life experiences, educators can simulate the information gap by teaching two particular participants different information, which they then have to share with one another. In a science class, the following example from a unit on weather can see two students role-play a phone call between friends in different cities and quiz each other on what the patterns of climate are in their specific region. This form of exercise harbors a student-centered outlook within the classroom setting and allows adult students to actively participate with the course content rather than being passive absorbers of information (Roberts, 2000).

Although writing tasks are best done at home due to the amount of time required to complete the job adequately, they can also be completed in class. Brainstorming ideas, arranging thoughts and ideas are but few of the many ways writing assignments can be accomplished with the aid of student peers. In class groups, students can read one another's work, react to it, and perhaps suggest small improvements. Nevertheless, students are focusing their work on subject matter that they have selected. The following is an example that demonstrates how students can complete such a task in a student-centered biology classroom. Students can be asked to write about a threat to the rainforest or to describe life in a zoo or a natural environment from the point of view of an animal that lives there. By discussing the ideas in class before students complete the writing assignment, adult educators give their students an opportunity to voice their potential choices and arrive at a decision that is of particular interest to them (Margolis and McCabe, 2006).

Classroom Applications Using Transformative Learning

Transformative learning theory has dominated adult education discourse in recent years. It builds upon the scholarship of other educational theorists, such as Habermas (1984) and Brookfield (1987). It has evolved into a comprehensive and multifaceted description of how individual learners interpret, validate, and reformulate their learned experiences, whether these occur inside or outside of the formal classroom setting (Cranton, 1994; 1996; 1997; 2006; Cranton, and King, 2003; Dirkx, Mezirow, and Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 1991). The goal of transformative learning is to realize the potential of learners to "become more liberated, socially responsible, and autonomous thinkers, to make informed decisions by becoming more critically reflective as "dialogic"

thinkers in their engagement in a social context" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 29). In this circumstance, dialogic learning is the result of egalitarian dialogue. In other words, it is the consequence of a dialogue in which various people can exchange information and provide arguments based on validity claims (if and only if the conclusion of the claim is logically entailed by the premise and not on power claims (the basis of status). Paulo Freire (1970) distinguishes between two approaches: a dialogical one that promotes understanding, cultural creation, and liberation; and a non-dialogic one, which denies dialogue, distorts communication, and reproduces power. We may attempt to have something we say considered good or valid by imposing it forcibly, or by being ready to enter a dialogue in which other people's arguments may lead us to rectify our initial stances. In the first case, the "interactant" holds power claims, while in the second case, validity claims are held. While in power claims, the argument of force is applied; in validity claims, the force of an argument prevails. According to Habermas (1984), validity claims are the basis of dialogic learning.

Examples of Curriculum and Course Content

Mentoring is a strategy for transformative learning in a professional, personal and organizational development. By providing a supportive culture, educators can create the environment for transformative learning to occur. Through this experience, mentoring becomes a transformative relationship in which individuals can reconstruct themselves (Dirkx, Mezirow, and Cranton, 2006). As a two-way process, mentoring is a learning tool for both the teacher as well as the student. Theories of critical reflection and a learning partnership between the teacher and the student create a support system for reflecting on their assumptions, thus improving self-efficacy (Margolis and McCabe, 2006). To do so,

it is vital to consider alternative perspectives and develop a language for making connections between theory and practice. Educators must find a curriculum and a common language through discussion of individual assumptions, continuous feedback, and action research through applications of the program that teachers make within their classrooms. A classroom activity can be journaling by the students of their daily activities and classroom experiences. Once the end of the term or school year arrives, individuals can see the progression they have gone through since the beginning of their time in class. The journaling activity will lead, most likely, to the transformation of beliefs by both teachers and students and to the development of a knowledge base that is co-constructed through the experience.

Mezirow (1991) argues that a defining condition of being human is our continuous need to understand and order the meaning of our experiences. He refers to this phenomenon as "meaning making". He further argues that if human beings are unable to understand reality, people will frequently return to common traditions, and appropriate explanations from authority figures by resorting to rationalization. This is usually when individuals experience some form of "culture shock" and need to return to their so-called common ground (Weaver, 1986). Only when there is a separation between prior and current experiences will the ground for learning be transformative in nature. Therefore, a moment of unfamiliarity is the key to the transformative learning model. The relationship between the learner's experience and subject matter is the fundamental starting point as both elements are considered socially constructed, and therefore, can vary based on individual learner experiences.

For Mezirow (1991, 2000), transformative learning involves three fundamental

phases: a disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and reflective discourse. The disorienting dilemma is usually triggered by a life crisis or major life transition, such as re-entering into the formal classroom setting. It is necessary to engage with problems that have no absolute solutions because these give rise to the potential for transformation in learning. During the phase of critical reflection, the learner considers what is known and believes to be true (Mezirow, 1991). For example, students may share their common feelings of unease upon their re-entry into their adult education classroom setting. In doing so, they may see the similarities amongst their classmates, as well as their differences. For transformative learning to occur, the aforementioned consideration of one's assumptions, values, and beliefs (meaning schemes) goes beyond mere reflection. It requires particular conditions where anti-bias and student-centered curricula actively provide people with a concrete understanding of the common social problems and issues that surround them, in hopes of helping them to use their own life experiences and adequate strategies that will improve social learning conditions for them and their peers. This generates an "awareness of a perception, thought, feeling, or of one's habit of doing things" to critical reflection which involves making an assessment of and examining the sources of that which is being reflected upon (Mezirow, 1991, p.2).

Mezirow refers to this level of critical reflection as perspective transformation (1991, 2000). The distinction between learning that takes place at the level of simple awareness versus the learning that results from analyzing how we have come to possess certain assumptions, values, and beliefs is critical. Mezirow (1991, 2000) believes humans are frequently engaged in the learning process of adding or integrating new ideas into our understandings, thus altering our meaning schemes. Change at this level of

learning tends to refer to a specific belief, and is less global. However, the change in perspective that is found in transformative learning takes place much less frequently. A change in perspective is more global and metaphorical in nature, reflecting a more inclusive worldview. Perspective transformation leads to a more inclusive and integrative point of view for the learner. The individual is able to act autonomously and most importantly, makes choices by developing new understandings (Taylor, 1997). The link between the two is that as people's experiences and understanding of our inherent human differences becomes richer, their associated competence in a vast array of relations increases. Paulo Freire's strong aversion to the teacher-student dichotomy deepens the premise of this idea. As previously stated, the acknowledgment of a separation between teacher and student is present, but Freire (2001) suggests that a reconciliation of equality between the two roles would be the ideal. As a result, the egalitarian nature of the relationship between the teacher and the student creates a learning environment that is conducive to creating awareness of the life views of other students. It also allows for perspective transformation in the sense that students can now place themselves in the shoes of their classmates, allowing for a reformulation of the meaning of their own experience and thus, experience learning that is transformative in nature.

According to Mezirow (1991, 2000), learning at this deeper level takes place because we as humans yearn for a sense of agency and a desire to be included. Therefore, we struggle to understand ourselves in relation to others. Given this existential need, transformative learning is concerned with the domain of communicative learning which refers to learning where we seek to understand ourselves and others, and the social norms of the society in which we live. This type of learning is derived through language, and is

validated by consensus with people (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Thus, transformative learning is fully realized through engaging in the process of reflective discourse. Reflective discourse in this context is not simply represented by a "laissez-faire" ideology, seeking to understand another's point of view in order to build on this mutual learning. Rather, reflective discourse takes place during a process of genuine dialogue as participants seek to understand each other, learn to welcome difference, and search for common themes among seemingly contradictory perspectives. All of these ideas share the thematic premises of promoting transformative learning via classrooms that utilize anti-bias theory, student-centered learning milieus as well inclusive content.

Mezirow (1998) argues that a number of conditions influence the degree to which transformative learning takes place. He suggests that critical reflection requires open-mindedness, and refers to Bruner's (1990) definition, a "willingness to construe knowledge and values from multiple perspectives without loss of commitment to one's own values" (Bruner, 1990, p. 30). Essentially, the quote refers to how reflective discourse requires full participation in other conditions and attributes, such as including "accurate and complete information, freedom from coercion, an openness to alternative points of view, and the ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 14). It also encompasses the basic premises of the four theories that have been reviewed in this thesis. Mezirow (1998) acknowledges that these ideal conditions are never fully realized in practice, but rather constitute principles that can inform practice in insightful ways. He recognizes that the processes of critical reflection and reflective discourse are frequently intensive and difficult emotional struggles as they involve uncovering and critiquing our values and beliefs which comprise our sense of

worth and identity, and provide us with a sense of stability. Therefore, he stresses the importance of feelings of trust, solidarity, security and empathy being present in the group if the adult learners are to be able to participate fully and freely. Teachers are seen to play a critical role by facilitating a supportive emotional climate, sharing power and authority over the process with the learners, and challenging students to engage more critically throughout the process of reflective discourse.

Classroom Applications Using Inclusive Education

The critical reflection that needs to be fostered in participatory dialogue does not happen instinctively. The educator must provide leadership within the group by using questioning strategies that move discussions from a broad-spectrum to the personal identity of the adult student body. Beginning from a more general theme is important because it represents a broadening of analysis as the learner's underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs are challenged. As a result, critical reflection is deepened and actions are carried out (Freire, 1995). The end result from this process is what Paulo Freire called "conscientization", the outcome of critical reflection. This stems from the efforts to identify and address the systematic forces of oppression (Freire, 1970). The more the learners become conscientized, the more they discover their capacity to make meaning of their experience, recognize the links between structural forces and oppression, and their capacity and right to act upon this knowledge. Within the process, the learners experience empowerment or the taking of power by the oppressed as they shift from being passive "objects" to being "subjects" in charge of their own destiny. In order for any of these elements to take place, the underlying principles of inclusive education must be met and the individual must have the right to participate in learning. The school's duty is to

therefore accept, nurture and communicate with the student to this end. Both Mezirow (1991, 2000) and Freire (1970, 1995) focus on the learner's experience as the starting point to this end. The theories maintain that reflective dialogue involves the critical investigation of knowledge. Both educators and students are challenged not only to focus on what they think, but are also challenged to reflect on why they think in that particular way. Many of the adult students will have opinionated views to share considering their various backgrounds. Mezirow (1991, 2000) and Freire (1970, 1995) both insist that engagement in praxis is the ultimate evidence that this sort of transformative learning has occurred. Engaged pedagogy must recognize each classroom as different and therefore constantly reform strategies to address each teaching experience (hooks, 1994). Nevertheless, the different emphasis of praxis in the theories is related to the different educational foci for transformation: Mezirow's theory centers on the individual whereas Freire's (2001) theory emphasizes the collective.

Examples of Curriculum and Course Content

Educators can use a number of techniques to help build inclusive classroom communities. Some examples include involving students in problem solving, sharing books that openly deal with individual differences by discussion, and assigning classroom jobs that build a sense of community. Teaching students in such a fashion may seem unconnected to the purpose of adult learners, but often finding ways to associate content to the identity of the learners within the community can be a way for foreign students to integrate more comfortably (Roberts, 2000). Encouraging students to take the role of teacher and deliver instruction, e.g. read a portion of a book to their classmates, is but one example where learners can actively participate in an inclusive classroom.

From an adult educational perspective, the individual co-exists both separately and collectively from the social realm. First, they exist separately because the individual learner goals might differ from one student to the next. Secondly, they exist collectively because the learners actively engage in a classroom that requires mutual interchange. Thus, individual challenges can be overcome through the process of deepening one's autonomy, self-realization, and self-empowerment via inclusive classroom projects. The collective challenges can be overcome by Freire's (1995) focus on the how transformation emphasizes the power of social forces to shape the contextual reality of people's lives. A synthesis of the four theories that have been exemplified here allows the educator to manage the transformative learning needs of students more effectively (Freire, 2001).

Utilizing the theories that have been discussed at length in this thesis would foster adult student learning that generates a more inclusive and less discriminating worldview, all while taking into account the impact of social, political, and economic forces on how these conditions influence people. By examining the links between these reflections, the adult student population will benefit from a synthesis of each theory's core contentions. While engaging in these theories and applying their ideas does require time and is a long-term developmental endeavor, I argue that important interventions can take place during all phases of dialogue between the teacher and the student at the adult education level. The benefits to the student from even a brief encounter with an engaging classroom has the potential to foster an increased sense of self-respect as their knowledge, lived experience, and understanding of their predominant educational goals are actively solicited and validated. Not only does this create an increased sense of agency as their

individual learning needs are met, but the larger social structures that are currently inhibiting them can be mended when the appropriate solutions to these challenges are mutually generated.

The educational theories of anti-bias (hooks, 1994, 2000), student-centered learning (Freire, 2001; Dewey, 2000; Hofstede, 2005), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000; Freire, 2001; Horton, 1990; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010), and inclusive education (Freire, 2001; Dewey, 2000) can help adult educators engage their students in the process of transformative learning and critical reflection all while promoting a learning environment that operates according to these theories. Fostering learning of these principles by engaging with the educational theories presented here requires the educator to be well experienced in each of these areas. As well, the educator needs to be truly grounded in their purpose with a strong sense of agency, vision, and respect for the students, and the people with whom they are interacting. Stemming from these educational theories, the educator needs to create nurturing, supportive and expressive environments where students feel safe to explore the meaning of their experience, express and effectively deal with their feelings and emotions as they arise, and determine how they will engage with their new reality.

The student that learns in such an environment concretely sees how their learning definitively relates to their individual needs. Additionally, critical reflection allows the student to identify some of the oppressive forces that have created inadequate teaching practices. The level of this reflection demonstrates the change in perspective that Mezirow (1991) posits is indicative of transformative learning. The student possesses a more inclusive understanding and global worldview that allow him or her to engage in

informed decision-making. If the process of critical reflection had been grounded in a personal perspective, the student would have been encouraged to analyze the content that is presented in the formal classroom setting. Through the experience of developing relationships with a particular student body, individual students have the opportunity to come to know their reason for re-entering the formal schooling environment at a personal level, sometimes after several years. Within this context, they may also come to understand how engagement in their learning as active participants rather than passive objects empowers them to work with people through relationships of equity, respect, and mutuality. This newfound knowledge and the implications it has for them personally and professionally is captured in the idea that individual liberation is assured with that of others, and can therefore lead people to work together and achieve the fundamental capacity for hope and joy in life.

Summary

In this third chapter, I have presented specific examples that can be used in classrooms that rely on the premises of anti-bias theory (hooks, 1994, 2000), student-entered learning (Freire, 2001; Dewey, 2000; Hofstede, 2005), transformative learning, theory (Mezirow, 2000; Freire, 2001; Horton, 1990; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010), and inclusive education (Freire, 2001; Dewey, 2000). I have subsequently related the theories to examples from the literature on adult learning predispositions. These theories can foster learning by supporting critical examination of pre-existing values, beliefs and their influence on practice. Reflection on the relationship between the broader social, political, and economic forces and emancipatory praxis all stem from the premise of these theories. I have also identified a set of principles that can provide a framework for

structuring and facilitating learning for adult students through the above-mentioned educational theories, namely those of Mezirow (1991, 2000), Dewey, (2000) and Freire (1970, 1995). In this context, adult learning will be oriented to gaining a deeper appreciation of the capacity of teaching and learning to support the creation of reciprocal and equitable relationships between teachers and students, and to ultimately direct practice that advocates for social change. As well, adult students will enable themselves to consider how the social, political, and economic conditions that they already experienced are linked to their present condition.

The educational theories discussed in this thesis do not only have visible similarities that tie in together, but serve as methods that can help adult educators teach their students to be critical thinkers. After an in-depth analysis, all the theories correspond in the sense that it is essential to begin the transformative learning process by starting "where the people are", for it is the learner's lived experience of incompleteness and disorienting dilemma upon which critical reflection and dialogue are built. The critical reflection that takes place in dialogue around the learner's experience needs to move the adult learner to an increasingly critical consciousness of the material that is used in their classrooms. It appears that adult educators in our current structures do not adequately challenge their adult students to move beyond the themes of mainstream content. That is, that the focus on students' learning should lead to becoming aware of their own cultural beliefs, acknowledging the inherent biases of these beliefs, and recognizing the differences that exist in other's beliefs about the world. The anti-bias curriculum does this by bringing adult learners to consciously consider that culture has deep impact on behavior and personality (hooks, 1994). The student-centered classroom

encourages distinctive learning styles and this gives the students the ability to create a stronger learning environment for themselves. Everyone carries patterns of thinking, feeling, and action learned throughout their lifetime. Thus, their learning not only could be informed by their own life experiences, but should be (Hofstede, 2005). Mezirow (1991) refers to this level of learning as "thoughtful action with reflection" and differentiates it from critical reflection that is integral to transformative learning. Thoughtful action occurs when the student consciously reflects upon existing values, beliefs, and assumptions and in doing so gains a broader understanding of oneself and others, thereby allowing for more meaningful interaction. However, transformative learning involves a change in perspective that is more global and symbolic in nature, and leads to a more inclusive worldview (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Dewey (2000) furthers this idea by stating that the community's duty to education is to create a level of learning that involves critical reflection that considers not only awareness of the source and context of the knowledge, values, and beliefs but also a deeper analysis of the validity of these assumptions or premises. Critical reflection is recognized when the student shifts from questions concerned with what they believe, value, or think, to questions that center on why they think, value, or believe in a certain way. As Freire argued, his own ideas were in constant need of reinvention and adjustment depending on the context in which they need to be applied. Similarly, he understood that education is contextual and that each context has corresponding needs and outcomes. This reflection of Freire's involves the learner's emotions, thoughts, social skills, and intuitions as individuals. Thus, there is no single method of instruction or "best practice" that exists (Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010). The arguments made in this thesis share that very same view and acknowledge

that the links made here may not necessarily apply to other particular realms of education, but that they could validly inform the needs of the current adult learner in Canada.

Chapter Four: Summary, Implications, and Conclusions

Introduction

This final chapter reiterates the influence on adult education design and practice of the four theories examined in this thesis: Anti-bias theory (hooks, 1994, 2000), student-entered learning (Freire, 2001; Dewey, 2000; Hofstede, 2005), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000; Freire, 2001; Horton, 1990; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010), and inclusive education (Freire, 2001; Dewey, 2000). Moreover, I shall discuss some of the implications of the principles behind each theory for a) teaching practice, b) administration, and c) research, in addition to drawing some conclusions about the major takeaways from this thesis.

Perspectives and Support for Future Development

In recent years, government, business, and educational participants have increasingly called for an educational structure that prepares adult learners to function competently within the context of our modern world. The adoption of such a perspective at the institutional level has created a legitimate space for educators and students to broaden their worldview to encompass the contrasting realities of people from around the world.

The principles put forth by the theories examined in this thesis were found to be compatible in essence with practices oriented to promoting a vision and mission for a solid basis to educating adult learners. It is, therefore, efficacious for adult educational institutions to pursue educational initiatives that develop partnerships of reciprocity and mutuality where dialogue can occur. All four theories have provided elements towards

activating a model that fosters student awareness of socio-cultural, socio-economic, and national differences as well as the recognition of attitudes and behaviors required to adapt teaching methods to meet the needs of adult leaners. Review of the literature revealed that theories alone have yet to fully provide students with the means to systematically analyze the implications of their own learning or understand the social repressions that result, at least in part, from inadequate teaching practices. As well, theories did not yet appear to have been synthesized adequately enough to foster the ability of the educator to recognize the role of teaching for equitable and sustainable learning for all. Having combined the main ideas from each theory examined as well as providing some concrete examples of their applications in Chapter III, a clearer vision of the way adult educators can recreate an ideal classroom has been activated.

In order to enact practice that reflects a comprehensive promotion of improved and ideal learning conditions for adults, they also need to expand their knowledge of complex social forces surrounding them. In order to perpetuate this readiness, consistent interchange is vital because: “Dialogue creates open and trusting relationships between two or more people; monologues, too often the dominant discourse in schools, are closed relationships that demand centralized, epistemic authority” (Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010, p.4). Engaging with critical perspectives and the concept of cultural safety would enable students to explore the issues that govern their educational progression and the potential repercussions that could arise. Having the opportunity to examine these concepts in the field would encourage students to connect with the profound recognition that the reality of others is inextricably tied to their own experiences. Thus, any critically minded teacher, troubled by the lack of assistance for the reintegration of adult learners to

the formal schooling process, should be attracted to the dialogical andragogy and the compelling emphasis it has on student-centered learning (Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010). The ultimate structural transformations that could occur would help the integration of new understandings of self in relation to others. The increased awareness would also encourage adult students to consider ways of engaging with people in a systematic and effective manner which will promote social change and transformation for all.

Utilizing the aforementioned educational and learning theories to inform the principles of adult education practice would promote student learning about and engagement with transformative learning because they are consistent with the expectations and aims of adult learners. These theories demand the re-organization of power between teacher and student, by valuing the learner's lived experience as the starting point and content of reflection. If real liberation is truly achieved through popular participation, then the themes and trends discussed by scholars such as Paulo Freire and Myles Horton, for example, are substantiated and illuminate problems faced by educators around the world who are concerned with linking participatory education to the practice of liberation and social change (Horton, 1990). Recognizing the legitimacy of knowledge and encouraging critical analysis of broader social, political, and economic forces on knowledge development reveals the way that various theorists, working in such distinctive parts of the world and during different time periods, could arrive at similar ideas and methods. As well, critical reflection undertaken through these processes has the potential to lead to a deeper understanding of the personal and structural barriers that create social oppressions, thereby enabling people to collaboratively define and engage in actions that realize the fullness of humanity. I hope to have succinctly put forth a set of

principles for developing future curriculum that incorporates the central perspectives of the literature review and the consideration of alternative standpoints to guide future teaching practices both in Canada and around the world. Furthermore, there are important implications for teaching practice, for administration and for research in the field of adult education. We will briefly present each of these in the following pages.

Implications for Adult Teaching Practice

If educators are to successfully ground relationships of reciprocity and mutuality with students and orient teaching within a positive educational process, they will need to develop consensus for this model within their educational realm. Leadership at all levels will be required if this vision is to be put forward effectively. The important feature is that we must enable all teachers and all students to be primary contributors in the endeavor. Success of this educational project rests on leadership that will strive to support collaboration and empowerment through effective listening, respectfully tending to voiced concerns and reservations, and encouraging a mutual vision that represents group ambitions. It will entail collaborating as a faculty to develop knowledge regarding critical theories and their implications for teaching at the adult stage, along with the expertise necessary to competently engage with these approaches as the basis for the entire program. I must stress that it is most important to be grounded in a mutually developed and accepted vision of the classroom to make it a legitimate and integral component of the program in question.

It will be important for adult education centres to structure learning opportunities that will allow adult students to critically engage in dialogue around each other's

experience and learning goals. This dialogue serves two important functions. First, it provides a forum to debrief, share, and validate the important learning that has taken place in all of their life circumstances. Secondly, it minimizes the divisions within student bodies and faculty that may arise if those involved in learning get somehow labeled superior compared to others and therefore elitism ensues. Supporting a collaborative and mutually beneficial teaching and learning environment requires that the expertise and learning of all parties be valued, recognized as important, and worthy of respect.

All members of the teaching profession involved with transformative learning will need to establish relationships that are reciprocal, mutually beneficial, and respectful of the lived experience and knowledge of the adult learners in their classroom. Existing partnerships can be evaluated in light of these goals with efforts to explore ways of incorporating new methods to strengthen the partnership. All of this work takes time, interpersonal skills, knowledge, commitment, flexibility, and a willingness to live with ambiguity and uncertainty. Educators will therefore need to appreciate the process of working with students throughout the experience as vibrant, useful and constantly evolving. They will need to possess a good sense of humor and a willingness to be open to the unexpected. They will need to be conscious that engaging in critical reflection of their own experience must be part of the solution, and that re-integration will be essential if teachers are to maintain integrity of purpose and vision during the experience.

Presently, the literature cites interest, academic achievement, and motivation as principal criteria for stimulating adult leaner's need to be back in school. It will be important to establish criteria that reflect the expectations of specific educational settings

and to work at developing strategies that allow all students to be successful and to participate regardless of personal status. If educators across Canada are to develop scholarship around informing adult learning and argue for fostering effective learning through essential knowledge and practice, then educators involved with the process need to write about their work from a Canadian perspective. This will require a commitment to furthering scholarship of this nature, writing expertise, time, and possible collaboration with other interested educators. Collaboration between schools, engaged with this process or wishing to be involved, needs to be actively pursued if this form of educational experience and the knowledge arising from it is to be advanced. Participants will need to come together and share among other topics, their expertise, challenges, successes, contacts, and teaching strategies. They will also need to consider how they can collaborate for writing purposes, generate research questions, and further develop and disseminate the growing body of knowledge about the relationships between practice, social issues and other elements that require the attention of adult education scholars globally. It is my hope that in the future, students will have the opportunity to share their experiences in order to appreciate a learning path that is better suited to their needs. Such collaboration between schools will require commitment, vision, planning, and a belief that jointly, we can provide more optimally the individualized learning needs of students throughout Canada and set an example worldwide.

Implications for Administration

Administrative support within education is critical to successful implementation of an educational structure that identifies the needs of students. Following this, it is important to consider that we live in a world where education is becoming more and

more vital. We must therefore critically and consciously make decisions that will lead to the best outcomes for the student population, particularly adult learners in light of their specific needs. The expertise of faculty needs to be supported and brought into committee decision-making at various levels. Moreover, the capacity and skills of all faculty and staff in the practice of adult education need to be expanded to broaden the cadre of expertise and scholarship within the institution.

Administration can provide support by validating the aims of the experience and providing the organizational support necessary to deal with the legal and logistical issues, and so forth. A great deal of time and energy will be required to develop a project of this magnitude. It will be necessary to write specific course proposals, develop relationships with the faculty members and negotiate goals and objectives, determine daily experiential opportunities that will meet these goals and objectives, develop selection criteria, support student initiatives, and structure and provide an orientation that academically and emotionally prepares students for the experience. Although many would tend to overlook administrative support as a core component of the process, it is clearly needed to recognize the additional work entailed and ease staff into their tasks accordingly. Administration within schools can also support further scholarship by actively encouraging local and national organizations to provide leadership to bring together interested educators for the purpose of developing a strategic plan to further integrate adult learning methods into programs at various levels of the system. Likewise, the network of teachers formally involved in the process at all levels needs to be expanded to include any and all teachers that are interested and who might inform the processes in new and insightful ways.

Implications for Research

The literature that has been reviewed holds many linkages to informing adult teaching practices. Although the combination of ideas might not be originally intended for application to adult education, the connections they have can most definitely be applied to this area. Some significant benefits for adult educators and learners include developing a broader worldview, appreciating the richness and diversity of viewpoints, and identifying and re-orienting attitudes and behaviors to meet their mutual goals for learning. However, there is a gap in the research to substantiate how these changes have contributed to improving individual teaching practices or developing leadership in the short and long term. Given that no real experience was developed to foster learning or was facilitated with the four particular educational theories discussed in this thesis, there has not been an opportunity to conduct research on the direct efficacy of an approach that combines them. A future research agenda therefore needs to be guided by two fundamental questions. First, what issues arise from teaching adult learners through the combined strengths of the four educational theories discussed in this thesis? Second, what are the research methods that will best capture the elements of the experience, and more importantly whether the experience impacts the students and the educators in an equally beneficial manner?

It will be important to identify how student attitudes and behaviors are influenced by participation, what elements of the experience contribute to these changes, whether or not the changes are sustained, and if so, how these changes impact the student's perceptions of themselves as human beings, and how they influence their practice to lead to social change. Arising from these queries are other research questions that relate to the

following considerations: what are the selection criteria that best capture adult student enthusiasm and how does teaching from the combination of perspectives described in this thesis influence student learning and which methods are most effective? Finally, how can the learning of the adult students be successfully integrated if their learning environment were to once again change? All of these concerns pave the path to informing future research. Educators with student-centered, progressive, and constructivist teachings who might reject ideas of bias and exclusion in education do not consider the moral underpinnings of the arguments made in this thesis (Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010). It is notable to research the impact of the relationships and encounters with students and faculty. The ways in which these influence their sense of agency, purpose, and understanding of themselves will allow people to identify the factors that lead to less than adequate teaching practices but also to amend past mistakes in their teaching practice. There is a need for research methods, both qualitative and quantitative, to effectively measure this currently under investigated area. Any research to this end needs to adopt an action-research design to involve the educators and the learners collaborating in the development of the research questions, determination of the research methodology, and evaluation of results.

Behaviors that are typical of adult learners evolve over a long period of time and require many interventions along the way. These can include heightened self-esteem, enactment of new behaviors, and gradual integration of new ways of being within the existing understanding of self. Many of the objective conditions that prohibit adoption of new attitudes and behaviors such as institutional policies and dominant norms of teaching practice require long-term policy and social changes. Consequently, there is also need for

research that seeks to identify the steps in the overall educational process, work environment, and personal life experience that support significant behavioral change.

Consideration of Some Potential for Resistance

Educators and administrators are among the individuals that have some criticisms of the educational models discussed in this thesis. In some cases, individual groups such as parents and students also distrust the partial or full inclusive approaches because they neglect at times to acknowledge the fact that most students with varied needs require individualized instruction or highly controlled environments. Thus, students with serious distraction problems may be unable to focus in a classroom that contains twenty or more students. This is a circumstance that all teachers must contend with, and is not a direct result of the practice of inclusion. Some researchers have maintained that schools neglect to prepare general education staff for students with special needs, thus preventing any chance of achieving successful integration.

An important note to make is that education as described in this thesis should not be viewed as a particular platform that is visibly different from other ones. Therefore, the fear of placing students in an inclusive classroom due to worries of ridicule by other students should not be a concern. Rather, the argument here is that the inclusion of learners acts as a key component in all classrooms, as does a student-centered learning environment and an anti-bias curriculum. These then build upon each other to set the stage for transformative learning for adult learners as they adjust as quickly as possible to the mainstream of the school that they have often been away from for long periods of time. Proponents counter the idea that students with particular needs are not fully included into the mainstream of student life because they are secluded to “special

education". They maintain that isolating students with those needs may lower their self-esteem and may reduce their ability to deal with other people. However, at least one study indicated that mainstream education has long-term benefits for students as indicated by increased test scores (Van den Bos et al., 2007).

Students with severe behavioral problems, such that they represent a serious physical danger to others, are poor candidates for inclusive education, because the school has a duty to provide a safe environment to all students and staff. Finally, some students are not good candidates because the normal activities in a general education classroom will prevent them from learning. For example, a student with severe attention difficulties might be highly distracted or distressed by the presence of other students working at their desks. Inclusive education needs to be appropriate to the student's unique needs, which differ greatly from person to person. Most students do not fall into these extreme categories, as most students who attend school are not violent.

Some advocates of inclusive education promote the adoption of education practices where everyone is exposed to a "rich set of activities", and each student does what he or she can do, or what he or she wishes to do and learns whatever comes from that experience. The inclusion of students requires some changes in how teachers teach, as well as changes in how students with and without "special needs" interact with and relate to one another. Inclusive education practices frequently rely on active learning, applied curriculum, multi-level instructional approaches, and increased attention to diverse student needs and individualization.

Conclusions

Our growing interdependence as people is challenging us to broaden our worldview and deepen our understanding, knowledge, and skills so that we may be able to effectively collaborate and mutually contribute to a better life for all of the world's citizens. It would not be naïve to state that both students and teachers have sought in some way to advance the capacity to promote the well-being of people worldwide. Educators are recognizing the need to support students to understand the interconnection of social, economic, political, and historical forces that shape who we are and what we do, yet we still have ways to go. Education is viewed as a critical force that can challenge student's attitudes that lead to the oppression of people and enable them to develop the knowledge, values, and beliefs that underscore a more inclusive worldview; one that recognizes, respects, and works to uphold the rights and dignity of all people.

As teachers, we share a unique skill and privilege to contribute to the promotion of education. As students, most adults hold a unique view of the world and can benefit from our practices because they will ultimately become more critical individuals. In doing so, educators will enable students to develop meaningful relationships with others, thus expand their understanding of their own humanity and their capacity to engage in global action with others to advance education as a basic human right. The challenges of competing priorities, time constraints, professional resistance, and lack of collaboration among administrators need to be overcome for educators to give their adult students the opportunity to foster and achieve their learning goals.

Regardless of individual ideology, teaching as a profession is embracing a more

radical vision of caring. Mahatma Gandhi embraces this idea with two of his quotes: "Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever." and "You must be the change you wish to see in the world". Both these quotations eloquently summarize the role of both educators and students. The encounters we have serve as learning experiences, experiences from which people can draw from as they age and progress through school and life and that can inform a variety of societal issues (hooks, 2000). If there is one major takeaway from this entire thesis, it is that lived experiences help us figure out who we are, and therefore need to be part of the learning process. We need to live with the demands to support student learning that will strengthen our collective commitment to promoting global social justice and hopefully find the answers that will allow individual learners to become the primary agents in this process. It is my enthusiastic hope that in collaboration with each other, adult learners, teachers and students alike, will continue to strive to achieve their goals and flourish in their educational quest for themselves and for contributing to the common good.

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